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The City & Country School

formerly

THE PLAY SCHOOL

14 MacDougal Alley

New York

1919-1920

TEACHING STAFF

CAROLINE PRATT, Director

NELLIE M. HILL, Secretary

EDITH DAY

CAROLINE D. EMERSON

HARRIET FORBES

LAURA GARRETT

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AUXILIARY TO THE STAFF

BUFORD JOHNSON, Psychologist

EDITH LINCOLN, Physician

MARY S. MAROT, Recorder

VEDA ELVIN, School Visitor

LUCY SPRAGUE MITCHELL, Stories

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
PRESS

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A WORD OF EXPLANATION

We are constantly asked, especially by parents who are trying to place their children in what they consider a good school, how our school differs from the kindergarten, and again how it differs from the Montessori schools.

The kindergarten is a system of teaching. It undertakes to teach children to play in such a way that through the process they will become educated. The formal kindergarten is fixed and arbitrary, as much so as any school system. It acknowledges the activities of children in general but not their individuality. It attempts to socialize activities at a time which is pretty generally acknowledged to be a period of individual development.

This is only partially true of some of the "radical" kindergartens. They have modified their practice so as to permit more individual play, but even so it is not unfair to say that these kindergartens are *teaching systems* in the main.

The Montessori system is a *system of training*. It gives the children more freedom in their environment than the kindergarten. That is, the children may move about and choose what they will do. The material from which they choose, however, is *training* material. Instead of the teacher as a trainer the odium is thrown upon the insensitive blocks, bits of fabric, weights, sand paper letters and figures. This training material the children may not use freely to carry out purposes of their own, but they must do that one thing for which the material is designed. So the freedom of choice lies between a very limited set of activities.

One of the signs of the passing of babyhood is to be found in the growing purposefulness of children's activities. They

want to do something with the thing they construct. They want a goal, whether they reach it or not. The Montessori material stops short of this. The activities do not function from the child's point of view. They build a stair, but the stair has no purpose. It isn't applied to anything. The attitude is well illustrated by a teacher who visited our school. She saw boats and bridges in process of building. She acknowledged the value of this constructive work: "but," she said, "what do you do when they want to play with these constructions?" This is a fairly typical attitude of the person who sees a school merely as a training place for children.

Our school regards both a teaching system and a training system with suspicion. Indeed, it aims not to be a system at all. It aims to be the very opposite—an experiment. It tries to be a part of the environment of the children, and in this part to study them and meet their intrinsic requirements *while they grow*. We know we can't *teach* them to grow—we can only furnish the conditions for growth in so far as we know them. We can't *train* them to grow. Our knowledge is too limited to permit us to train them. We know neither the goals towards which they should aim nor the natures of the children sufficiently to train them. Children are different from apples for example. Their term of preparation for a place in the world is longer, making it possible that all the conditions may change in this training period; also, their natures are more complex. While training one part—such as the senses—we may put into operation the very things that will stultify some other part. Growth takes place as a whole, and no training system has been devised which recognizes this fundamental fact. The only thing we can do is to furnish conditions for growth, taking care that the conditions include a recognition that the "appetite" of each child must be considered or he won't attack the conditions. Our desire is to be as scientific as dietitians are becoming. They analyze food properties, determine which properties are essential to growth, and provide

sufficient variety so that the appetite of each person is appealed to. The flow of the saliva and the gastric juice which make digestion possible is dependent upon whether the food appeals to the person. If there is no appetite, causes are sought. It is a sign of lack of health in some direction.

We are using just such means to establish the physical health of the children in the City and Country School. It is a more difficult matter to work out such a plan for general growth, but we aim to do this work with the help of numerous people trained for special parts of it.

While we are not a *teaching system* nor a *training system*, a great deal of good teaching goes on, and training is connected with everything the children undertake. The difference is a difference in general method. The children are carrying on things in which they are interested. They have the necessary "appetite" for what they are doing—the appetite which releases the whole performance and makes it possible for the organism to work as a whole. The teacher is there to enrich each individual child's performance; to awaken and help him to satisfy his curiosity; to direct him to sources of information; to help him to adjust his social difficulties.

Each group consists of about ten children, beginning with three-year-olds and extending to and including a group of eight-year-olds.

The program in general consists of trips for all except the youngest, and the expression of what they get from the trips and other sources in the school rooms and yards.

On trips the life of the city is opened up to them in a new and thrilling manner; the teacher in each group tries to arouse the habit of observation; to raise interest and by stimulating the children's inquiry to get them, in joyous competition with other members of the class, to discover for themselves the relationships that lie between the humming activities of the streets and the needs of the community at large. The world for them to become discoverers in and eager inquirers about is thus thrown

open to them as a part of their school experience at a very early age. The materials in the school are selected with the thought of having ready at the children's hands, playthings which will give them fascinating opportunities to dramatize the world with which they are becoming acquainted. There are blocks to build railroads and houses and stations and stables with, horses and carts that they may harness exactly as the horses on the streets are harnessed, drawing materials that they can use for the free expression of whatever stored-up impressions they carry in their minds, clay to be moulded into the shape of whatever they wish, a bench and tools to make toys; scissors, paste, wood.

The four- and five-year groups we try to interest in transportation. On the trips, cars, coal wagons, ferry boats, tug boats with their trains of freighted barges, trains, delivery carts, become the subject of inquiry: What are they carrying? Where are they going? What makes them go? What would happen if they stopped going? During these two years they are left to their own initiative, little interference on the teachers' part obstructs their freedom of action and thought; they learn how to observe, and bring forth wonderful results from their association of these two habits. In this manner each child throws out lines in every direction, which indicate to the teacher where individual teaching can be applied later on.

In the next groups a more definite program is used. The six-year-old children begin to study food; their trips are in connection with this subject, there are discussions in which the distribution and preparation of food is taken up and worked out carefully. Dramatizations ensue, and are encouraged as a means of vivid interpretation. When lunch is being prepared in the kitchen they help the cooking teacher. Each in his turn has an opportunity to go with her to market; each is given a chance to collect the luncheon money and keep the books. They also play store. By these methods the children learn all the fundamental arithmetical processes before they handle large numbers, and learn them in such a practical way that we feel certain arithmetic will never be a bug-bear to them.

Each child in the six-year group knows how to handle a foot rule because experiments in carpentry have made this necessary. They know the divisions of an inch, and thus have a practical basis for the understanding of fractions.

There has been and will be in future, a definite effort to give the children of seven and eight years of age real experiences in connection with their food, shelter, clothing and transportation program. They will have a period when the whole responsibility of planning, marketing, estimating cost and serving their own luncheon will be given them. Their shop work will be so arranged that it will contain experiences rather than lessons. It is hoped that these older children will begin to make the farm theirs. Their Spring experience should be preparation for life out there. As the groups develop in strength, self-reliance and knowledge of practical things, it will be possible for them to construct a real shelter for themselves, equip it and look after their own needs for a season. It is an integral part of the school plan to have the farm serve as a basis for carrying out larger schemes of self-expressive and self-reliant effort than are possible in the city.

Real experiences such as have been spoken of contain implications which for the sake of clearer understanding we may term arithmetic, science, geography, history. It is no part of the school's purpose to neglect these implications but on the contrary to make them so vivid through experience that they will never lose significance in the lives of the children.

Arithmetic is practical. The children measure and construct according to measurements. They learn to multiply, add, divide and subtract inches and feet. They estimate costs of luncheons and buy their separate articles. They are *drilled on these processes* so that they will be able to save time in making computations and they accept the drill cheerfully because they realize the necessity. They are given problems similar to those they meet in practise and they make up problems for each other.

They begin *geography* at five when they make their trips into the big world and take account of direction. When six, they are pretty well equipped to go over their trips on a smaller scale on the school floor. They begin to plan their trips ahead by reference to a map. At seven years of age they are ready for map making on a large scale. They know the neighborhood and the general large thoroughfares and the direction they take.

History is approached from the present. The yesterday of transportation, of food and of shelter and clothing is logically approached from today and is incidental to every discussion of present day problems.

Science is to be experimented with in the future by explaining the things which surround the children and giving them opportunities for application of principles through construction. The chance to express what they get is to be left open to the older children as it has been to the younger.

Reading and writing will be given opportunity in special ways,—reading as a new tool of acquisition and writing a new tool of expression.

Tentative detailed programs of the children's work in the two older classes may be obtained by parents on application to the office or class room teacher.

The children of the three older groups are expected to spend two summer months at the farm. It is too early to do more than indicate a summer program. This first summer the garden and a way of making the most of it was pretty well established. One of the teachers had charge of the garden. It was her laboratory and the place where she met the children and helped them to become scientific and constructive at the same time. She had the help at intervals of a scientist who made the garden "hindrances" the subject of science lessons. The science was practical and applied then and there. The constructive result was plenty of delicious fresh vegetables. The extension of this will be to the fruit on the place and to the

canning, drying, and preserving for the winter. Looking forward to the time when the children are old enough to market their produce and carry on a business, one can predict efficient practical intelligent youth with something of dependable value with which to start the business of living. The household must be treated in the same way. There must be a person in charge of the household who will regard the home as her laboratory and opportunity for getting a constructive and scientific program over to the children.

The play of the children as it works out in constructive processes must also be in charge of a person specially fitted for it. We have in mind the working out of interesting occupation along the bed of the stream. The play materials will be such things as clay, sand, lumber, cement and their application to the stream. Big cooperative play projects will be given every opportunity and help. Most of the teachers swim and love out of door sports. They tramp, work and play with the children, and teach them incidentally the joy of living out of doors.



SPECIAL WORK

Lessons in *music* are given twice a week to all the groups. The aim of these lessons is to develop a genuine love for music in each child and to give him the use of his singing voice as one means for its expression.

Care is taken to use only such music as shall be of value and to connect it, as often as possible, with the special interest and study of each group.

In the first and second groups we arouse interest in music, give the children songs they can enjoy and understand—songs they can express themselves in and through which we begin to develop the sense of rhythm and pitch. The use of the tone-bars and simple musical instruments gives an additional means for self-expression.

In the third group songs again are used as the basis of development, adding simple rhythm and pitch devices.

The fourth group adds to its fund of song material a definite knowledge and use of intervals. Especial attention is given in this group to the setting of short exercises to original tunes.

A very fascinating interest is offered the children once every week when a teacher arrives with *animals* and a fund of knowledge about the biological sciences. The animals are generally brought in pairs, and with the subtlest gift of imagination the children are given a fine and delicate approach to sex knowledge. They are taught a love and interest in animals, the careful handling and care of them. This is often the medium for breaking down the fears of nervous children, the interest in the animals becoming so intense that they lose their timidity in curiosity and enthusiasm.

Health is to be an integral part of the program of the school in the future. That is, the children are to look after their own health through greater attention to nutritive values of food, rest periods and fresh air. After a doctor's examination and attention to chronic or organic difficulties, the children will be taught to care for their bodies as they are taught to care for any of their possessions. The help of parents will be enlisted in carrying out this part of the program.

In attempting to center the activities of the children in the *immediate and present* rather than the *remote and past* it has been found that there is little literature written for children which serves to vivify their experiences. To supply this need a study of the forms children naturally use to express themselves as well as the content they are interested in, is being made and *stories* written in accordance with these findings. This work has in it as a possibility not only the creation of a new literature for children but as well an approach to the creation of literature which the children may themselves use.

THE FARM

The older children are expected to spend two summer months at the school farm. The farm is situated five miles from Hope-well Junction, a station on the Central New England Railway. It is reached by a train connection at Beacon, New York, a station on the New York Central. The farm has unlimited resources as a school farm. It contains a good sized stream, a hundred acres of woodland and pasture and fifty acres of tillable land. The main house has been built for the children and teachers and the farm house has been converted into livable quarters to supplement the main house. There is plenty of running water with shower baths and near by pools for bathing. There are play grounds along the stream. This summer, one

acre of land was tilled and kept the family of twenty people in fresh vegetables. Most of the work after the first planting was done by the children and teachers. The children helped to gather the vegetables and prepare them for cooking before they were taken to the house. They learned to recognize many of the garden enemies, the most persistent of which, *weeds*, they fought all during the summer. The children picked out the best plants for seed and set them aside to be gathered when ripe. They gathered, labelled and put them away for use next summer, thus connecting the work of two summers.



SCHOOL ROOMS AND PLAYGROUNDS

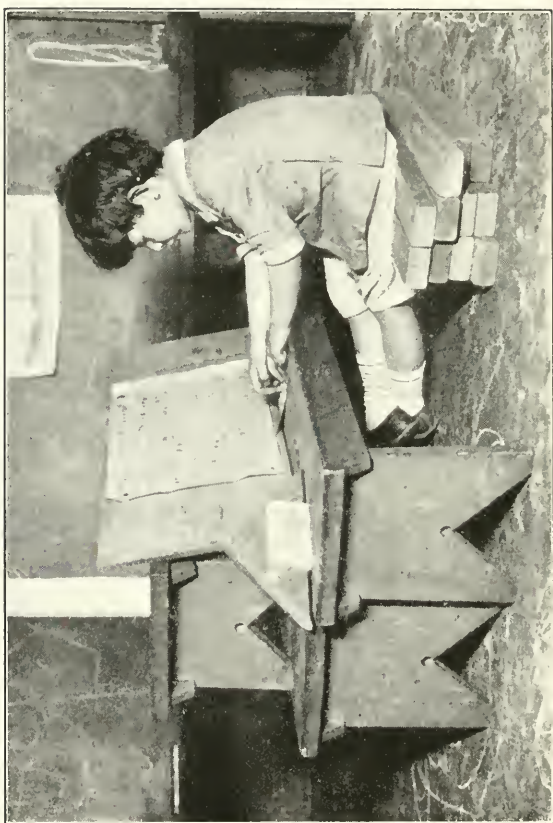
Each group has a room to itself, sunny, luminously decorated rooms that have an atmosphere of light and laughter and color. They seem somehow to suggest when you enter them the joyous mood of childhood. The three youngest classes are at No. 30 MacDougal Alley, and the three oldest at No. 14 MacDougal Alley. Both these buildings have pleasant yards. They are equipped with see-saws, cross-bars, slides and climbing poles; as well as carts, wheelbarrows and shovels, and large and small packing boxes. Each group has at least an hour in the morning for outdoor play, and for the children who come in the afternoon another hour is offered.

The Bureau of Educational Experiments furnishes to the City and Country School its Auxiliary Staff enumerated on the title page. Under a Bureau Committee the eight-year-old class has been added and is being taught by Miss Emerson. The development of the school beyond the seventh year is to be a unified effort on the part of both staffs. It is hoped the result will be a school which will extend as far as high school.

The health program is a Bureau experiment conducted by Miss Forbes, who teaches the children of the older groups.

HOURS, LUNCHEON AND REST PERIOD

School begins at 9 a. m. The morning session ends at 12. The three- and four-year-old children do not stay for lunch, but the older children remain, if the parents are willing, and have both lunch and a rest afterwards at the school. The charges for lunch will be no more than the cost of the food and the children will be asked to bring the money every day. The afternoon session begins at 1:30 and lasts until 3:30.



TUITION

There is no fixed price for tuition. The parents are asked to pay what they feel they can afford. There are scholarships provided for those children whose parents are eager to enter their children for the whole school course and feel unable to pay anything.

CALENDAR

The school opens Wednesday, October first.

Christmas and other holidays will be at the same time the Public Schools have theirs, with the exception of the Easter holiday. This will begin the Thursday before Easter and continue to the end of the week following.

The winter school will close June first.

The summer school for children of six and over will open at Hopewell Junction, N. Y., the first of July.

Parents are expected to register the children during the week preceding the opening, any morning from ten to twelve o'clock.

WORD TO MOTHERS

So careful a study is made of each and every child in the school, so keen is the interest of the teachers in any problem relating to the child's welfare, that there is a great eagerness on the part of the whole staff to co-operate with the mothers in discussion about everything concerning the children, their home and school life. Problems of school often throw new light on problems of home, and the problems of home are of the greatest importance to the teachers if they are to deal intelligently with the children. Every other week the school plans to have mothers' and teachers' meetings, and it is hoped that the mothers will feel free to come to them with criticism of the school if they have any, with problems, with ideas and suggestions. The school wants to keep the allegiance and interest of the mothers. By all that has gone before it will be clear to mothers who have the intention, for convenience sake alone, of leaving their children in the school for a few months, that we do not care to take children under such conditions. We want the children whose parents we can rely upon to co-operate with us from year to year. We ask them to interest themselves in the school's purposes and ideals and we are in hope that from time to time the knowledge that we have gained in the study of their children may be of service to them. But more than this we hope that our conferences together may contribute to the solution of some of the many intricate problems of childhood.

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